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## **THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ISLAMIC RELIGIOSITY, WORK ENGAGEMENT AND JOB PERFORMANCE**

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### **Abstract**

Numerous researches on the influence of work engagement on job performance have been conducted. Yet little research have considered the role of Islamic religiosity at the workplace in affecting job performance. Whereas, job performance and engagement of a Muslim should be examined based on Islamic perspective in order to sustain the productivity of a Muslim in dealing with hardships. For the reason that Islam obligates all Muslim to perform the trust (amanah) given and work as a form of worship. While in dealing with difficulties, a Muslim is obligated to be patient, self-control, tawakal (trust) to Allah's will, and believe that there is great wisdom behind everything that Allah does. These obligations can be fulfilled through the Islamic religiosity. In fulfilling these obligations, the individual will put the best effort to engage and simultaneously perform as well as possible. Thus, in response to the impact of Islamic religiosity in enhancing work engagement and sustaining job performance, this study is conducted to fill the gap by investigating the mediating role of work engagement on the relationship between Islamic religiosity and job performance of Muslim employees. The proposition of this study demonstrates the significant role of mediation of work engagement on the relationship between Islamic religiosity and job performance were found to be significant. Implications of the study for management and suggestions for future research are presented. This study recommends management and human resource practitioners to be proactive and formulate preventive strategy against low productivity among Muslim employees by provides training, create an environment that supports wholeness, meaningful work, and feeling of inner satisfaction. However, there is need for empirical studies to test the proposed relationships.

**Keywords:** Job Performance, Work Engagement, and Islamic Religiosity

### **INTRODUCTION**

The key of an organization to accomplish its goals and objectives is by having employees that have good performance (Siddiqui, 2014; Bonache & Noethen, 2014). Intrinsically, various factors that affect job performance have been widely studied, such as job satisfaction (Reio and Kidd, 2006), engagement (Shimazu et al., 2015), Islamic work ethics (Abdi et al., 2014), and personality (Fang et al., 2015), to name a few. Anyhow, to explain the quality of job performance among Muslim employees, the variables specified earlier are inadequate and less appropriate to be used in examining Islamic communities. As pointed by several studies that adapt the existing conventional measures on Islamic societies (Karim, Zamzuri & Nor, 2009; Mohd Yusoff, Othman & Othman, 2013) and the failure of factor analysis that they gain due to the different perspectives between Islam and other religion. These studies also failed to obtain a clear structure. For instance, besides certain facets of the Big-Five personality traits that display low internal reliability, in a study conducted in Indonesia, Halim Derksen and van der Staak (2004) found that on Openness to Experience domain, high congruence coefficient is failing generated due to "dogmatic attachment to values". Thus, in order to fill this gap, this study introduces other antecedents from Islamic perspective that gives the most profound impact on performance of Muslim employees in Malaysia. Out of many variables, this study only focuses on Islamic religiosity, as this variable embraces all Islamic work values.

In a stressful situation, burnout, and high workload in workplace, employees easily get demotivated and feel dissatisfied on their job. These circumstances have significant impact on employees' health and well-being, their quality of life and family life, turnover intention, and absenteeism that simultaneously lead to low engagement and performance among employees. Many studies in the field of motivation have been conducted to address these problems, yet studies that use Islamic religiosity or spirituality as a motivation in the workplace is still limited (Othman & Othman, 2013). Meanwhile, to gain motivation through Islamic religiosity - "hablu minallah & hablu minannas" (mends the relationship between God and human as well as the relationship between human beings) - is crucial (Alawneh, 1998). Both relations are found to be extremely important to ensure long lasting satisfaction in life although dealing with hardship. As stated in Al-Quran: "Wherever they were, they were covered with ignominy, except when they were protected by either a covenant with Allah or a covenant with men" (Al-Quran 3:112). This verse implies that the way out of all disasters or hardships is to rebuild hablu minallah and hablu minannas. Through this intrinsic motivation, individuals who have high Islamic religiosity will see hardships as an opportunity to gain more blessing from Allah. Simultaneously, they will be able to deal with hardships calmly, with courage, and without complaining, exert oneself, engage, and perform well.

Despite the hardships, individuals who have high Islamic religiosity also have a tendency to make their work become something meaningful and beneficial for the societies (Adeoti, Shamsudin, & Wan, 2017). Individuals, who see work as meaningful activities for their worldly and hereafter, will have a tendency to have positive mental health and psychological well-being (Sharabi, 2012). Following these findings, Sani, Soetjipto, and Maharani (2016) concluded that individuals who experience high levels of psychological well-being are characterized as being happy, engaged, satisfied with their life, and are thankful to God. To attain mental well-being, Islamic religiosity must be perceived, it involves the thought within an individual about the work done by him and the reason behind doing that work. In Islam, work is seen as an act of worship and the reason behind doing any kinds of work is to attain God's blessing. This belief can help in sustaining engaged employees, which can ultimately result in high job performance (Arora & Bhagat, 2016). Therefore, this study also focuses on the role of Islamic religiosity in enhancing work engagement. This paper includes the theoretical framework of work engagement as a mediator between Islamic religiosity and job performance. This paper proposes a conceptual model which can be helpful in understanding the impact of Islamic religiosity on work engagement which can result in high job performance among Muslim employees.

Overall, job performance of Muslim employees should be assessed by considering Islamic-related factors. Therefore, this study looked at the influence of Islamic religiosity in enhancing work engagement and job performance of Muslim employees. The findings of this study are expected to contribute to the literature and management. The findings of this study are also expected to encourage management and human resources department to give training to their staff regarding the importance of Islamic religiosity in handling hardship in the workplace. In fulfilling the objectives of the research, four propositions were proposed and demonstrated in the next sub-section.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Job Performance**

Job performance is defined as the extent of a person on how he or she succeeds in carrying out the job assigned (Amira, 2014). Ashfaq, Mahmood and Ahmad (2013) pointed out that job performance is the result of contributions through improvement of the employees' quality, flexible working environment and make the employees feel cozier. However, numerous researchers highlighted that performance is not just meant the result, outcome, or consequence of behavior or action (Alhusaini, 2012; McCloy, Campbell, & Cudeck, 1994). Performance is the conduct or action itself which gives impacts as the key in differentiating performance on outcomes.

In nursing context, job performance is defined as the conformity to standards while doing the job (McConnell, 2003). The responsibilities related to direct patient care (AbuAlRub, 2004) and the extent of employees' effectiveness in accomplishing their tasks (Al-Homayan, 2013) that can be observed and measured against some standard (Mrayyan & Al-Faouri, 2008) also illustrated as nurses' performance.

In term of the relationship between Islamic religiosity and job performance, previous study found that Islamic religiosity have high tendency in motivating Muslim employees to perform their tasks effectively and demonstrate the best behavior in life. In this regards, effective job implementation and practicing best behavior would create high job performance. This supported by Horvath (2015) that religiosity positively influence workplace cognition and behavior which will sustain employees' performance. Nevertheless, most of study that have been conducted on the relationship between Islamic religiosity and job performance are conducted theoretically. Besides limited empirical study, the existing researches only focuses in different setting and with different instrument. Thus, this study attempted to bridge the gap by examining the relationship between Islamic religiosity and nurses' performance.

### **Islamic Religiosity**

Religiosity is defined as living a life based on the teachings of a particular religion and grounded in spirituality (Barhem, Younies, & Muhamad, 2009; Hage, 2013). Ayranci and Semercioz (2011) further defined religiosity as "being close to God; feeling religious; and engaging in religious or spiritual activities". Religiosity also known as a solid belief that controls human intuition to express belief in a divine power. Briefly, religiosity is a commitment to keeping religious behaviors, practices (Kutcher et al., 2010), beliefs, expressions (Dy-Liacco et al., 2009), and motivation (Annalakshmi & Abeer, 2011).

In Islam, religiosity has a crucial influence on all aspects of Muslims' everyday lives, either in professional or personal life (Syed & Ali, 2010; Ajmal & Irfan, 2014). Islamic religiosity defined as the whole trust to Allah (tawakal) in any circumstances, especially in hardships (Osman-Gani, Hashim & Ismail, 2013). In Islamic religiosity, work is an obligation and seen as an act of worship (Sharabi, 2012; Basharat, 2009). Islamic religiosity also described as the extent of belief "if you do not see Allah, He sees you". Muslim employees who have this belief will be motivated to live their daily life (either in personal life, social life, or in work life) with good behavior and simultaneously result in effective performance (Sulaiman, Ahmad, Sbaih, & Kamil, 2014). As they realize that Allah always watching them and fears Allah wherever and whenever they do unethical deeds. Supported by Osman-Gani, Hashim, and Ismail (2013) that they found that there is positive relationship between Islamic religiosity and job performance. Previous findings also pointed out that the integration between religiosity and profession will encourage the employees to have a good attitude (Baldachino, 2008; Rani, Abidin, & Hamid, 2013; Faribos, 2010).

According to Shukor and Jamal (2013), the relationship with Allah (*hablu minallah*) and relationship with human beings (*hablu minannas*) must be included in measuring Islamic religiosity measurements in order to reflect the true meaning of Islam. In Islam, *hablu minallah* and *hablu minannas* must be balance in order to gain long-term satisfaction and success (Sharabi, 2012), either in worldly life or Hereafter. Supported by a Hadith that stated that "Whoever is mainly concerned about the Hereafter, Allah will make him feel independent of others and will make him focused and content, and his worldly affairs will fall into place" (HR. Tirmidhi).

Last but not least, Islamic religiosity also comprises of *ihsan* (the belief that Allah always watches and record the actions of His servants). According to Rahman and Rahman (1995), *ihsan* contributes positively to work efficiency, personality of an individual, work attitude as well as responsibility among co-workers although dealing with difficulties, based with the belief of the existence and presence of God with iman (faith) and taqwa (devotion) in Allah SWT. With the belief that Allah is constantly watching their deeds, Muslim employees will be motivated to live their daily life productively (Sharabi, 2012) and ethically (Abeng, 1997; Al-Kilani, 2010) supported with positive attitudes (e.g. patience, accountable, trustworthy, etc.).

### **Work Engagement**

The biggest predictor of organizational success is the employees who engaged well. For the reason that, besides being productive and innovative, engaged employees are less likely to quit as well as produce higher-quality of work and customer satisfaction (Amira, 2014). Engaged employees also tend to meet and to exceed their goals (Freeney & Fellenz, 2013) as well as preserving their personal welfare (Xanthopoulou, Bakker, Demerouti, & Hakanen, 2007). According to Christian & Slaughter (2008), engaged employees are individuals who have emotional connection in workplace that tend to impact

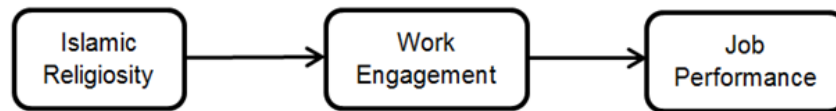
individuals' effort, behavior, and involvement while performing the assigned task. Meanwhile, according to Kim, Kolb, and Kim (2012), engaged employees are influenced by their positive, affective-motivational state of work-related welfare and commitment.

In this study, work engagement is defined as simultaneous investment of people behavior, who gets to be physically embroiled in tasks, cognitively concentrated and alert, and emotionally connected to their work and the people around them (Kahn, 1990). Concisely, work engagement viewed as a personal experience of an emotional connection to work (cognitive, emotional, and physical components – also known as vigor, dedication and absorption) as well as speculation of personal energy (Amira, 2014; Schaufeli *et al.*, 2002; Christian & Slaughter, 2008).

While majority of the study have proposed work engagement as predictor of various positive behavioral outcomes at workplace (Rich, Lepine, & Crawford, 2010), this study positioned work engagement as the mediating variable which explain and provide deeper meaning on the relationship between Islamic religiosity and job performance among Muslim employees. This is in line with Somers's (2001); Bryne's (2005); Jex and Britt's (2008) assertions that job performance studies can be more meaningful if a mediator is included in understanding and elucidating its relationship with the predictors. This study also supported by Mahesar, Chaudhry, Ansari, and Nisar (2016); and Hafizi, Koenig, Arbabi, Pakrah, and Saghazadeh (2014) who pointed out the need for additional empirical investigations on the relationship between predictors from Islamic perspective (e.g. Islamic HRM practices, Islamic work ethics, etc.) and job performance due to very little body of knowledge that utilize work engagement as mediation in this scope (Burke & El-Kot, 2010; Ramalu & Rashid, 2017). Hence, this study attempts to fill this gap by incorporating work engagement in our research model as the mediating variable in order to further explain the relationship between Islamic religiosity and job performance.

### **CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

**Figure 1: Proposed Conceptual Framework**



Based on conceptual framework above, 4 propositions are developed: First, there is a significant relationship between Islamic religiosity and job performance; Second, there is a significant relationship between work engagement and job performance; Third, there is a significant relationship between Islamic religiosity and work engagement; Last, there is a significant mediating effect of work engagement on the relationship between Islamic religiosity and job performance.

### **CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION**

As an effort in sustaining job performance of Muslim employees, job performance should be assessed by considering Islamic-related factors. Supported by previous findings which stated that people who have higher religiosity (Siddiqui, 2014) are more inclined to engaged (Barhem, Younies, & Muhamad, 2009) and to perform well (Osman-Gani, Hashim, & Ismail, 2013). Therefore, this study looked at the influence of Islamic religiosity in enhancing work engagement and job performance of Muslim employees.

Islam is the way of life. This implies that a Muslim must carry out his/her activities in every aspect of life in parallel with the teachings of Islam. Muslims are also expected to demonstrate fortitude and perseverance in the face of hardship. Work life is not always smooth as expected; there are circumstances that sometimes lead to anger, dissatisfaction, feeling underestimated, stress, and even burnout. Thus, in order to deal with hardships, all Muslim are encouraged to mends his/her relationship

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with Allah (Hablu minallah). As stated in a Hadith "Whoever works for the Hereafter, God will provide for his worldly life; whoever mends his relationship with God, God will improve his relationship with humans".

In accomplishing a job, Muslims must Amanah, that is, to perform in trustworthy, honest, and accountable manner. In short, whatever a Muslim does, he or she does it out of sincerity and in order to attain blessings from Allah in this life and in the hereafter (Al-Banna, 1978), in any circumstances.

Overall, managers should strive to find ways on how to develop Islamic religiosity in their employees. Offering formal and informal training sessions where employees are imbued with these concepts is one potential measure managers can implement. In addition, the organizational culture that reflects Islamic values will also promote Islamic religiosity necessary for employees to perform their job effectively. The findings of this study may encourage future researchers to investigate Islamic work-related concepts such as Islamic JP and Islamic work engagement.

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